C. Carsana, M. T. Schettino (edd.), *Utopia e utopie nel pensiero storico antico*. Centro ricerche e documentazione sull'Antichità Classica. Monografie 30. Roma: *L'Erma* di Bretschneider, 2008. vi, 216 p. € 110.00 (pb). ISBN 9788882654733.

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review].

Utopianism is a fundamental category of Western political and philosophical thought, and has also been at the centre of the modern historiographical debate on the ancient world. The present volume, originating from some papers delivered at two international conferences of the *Utopian Studies Society*at Madrid and Porto in 2003 and 2004, offers a variety of perspectives and analyses of various utopian aspects of ancient thought, historiography, architecture and urban planning, from the end of the Roman Republic up to the later Roman Empire. Written in the footsteps of the earlier, pioneering works by Santo Mazzarino, Moses Finley and Emilio Gabba[[1]], this book presents itself as a work-in-progress on the potential application of utopian models to the Roman world, and will hopefully stimulate further debate on this important, fascinating and, yet, often neglected topic.

The volume is divided up into three sections. The first tackles the complex problem of the relationship between political action and utopian tension. This section opens with Chiara Carsana's reflection on the utopianism in the ancient theory of the so-called mixed constitution. Carsana examines a series of Latin and Greek texts containing retrospective utopia, that is, the idealised past or the myth of an ancient ideal constitution as the model and constant inspiration for the political choices of a state. The obvious precedent for all these constitutional utopias is, obviously, the *Republic* of Plato. In the Roman world, constitutional utopias are always elitarian and conservative. The ideal of the mixed constitution was present as early as in Isocrates (on Solon), and Polybius operates a peculiar variation on the theme. In Polybius, the utopia of the mixed constitution is not projected in the past, but on a foreign nation, that is, Rome, while Cicero, by transporting the near past on a mythical level in the *De Republica*, goes back to the projection of an idealised Sullan constitution. Thereafter, in the fourth book of the *Annales* Tacitus no longer believes in the ideal of the mixed constitution, as in his aristocratic perspective every political form should gravitate around the senate. However, in the same period Dio of Prusa offers a radically different opinion, believing that the mixed constitution has been happily realised. Aelius Aristides' praise of Rome, besides, voices the ideals of the Eastern élites.

The second contribution, by Sylvie Pittia, turns to the application of utopian concepts to people, by looking at the image of the *optimus princeps* in the Roman period, and specifically at the idealised representation of emperors Tacitus and Probus in the *Historia Augusta*. There, utopia may be traced in the elitarian concept of the *optimus princeps* as the ideal senator. Tacitus is regarded as the ideal emperor because he had returned some Republican prerogatives to the senate, leaving the senate free to choose his own successor, and similarly, Probus incarnates the utopia of the fourth century: a restored, idealised senate, and an army deprived of any political authority. Going back in time, Pittia looks at a possible example of utopian literature of the late Republic, Cicero's *De legibus*, which aims to offer new bases for the Roman constitution. Cicero hopes for an evolution of the Roman censorship as an institution capable of the custody of the laws, and reflects on the problem of the education and morals of the politician. For Pittia, whether Cicero was talking about an idealised world, or about the reality of his own day, depends on whether this work was written in the 50s BC or in the Caesarian period. In any case, the Ciceronian model was never taken up by later thinkers – except, perhaps, in the *Letters* of Sallust.

The third contribution, by Lucio Troiani, looks at some Jewish apocryphal texts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, that has come down to us through the Christian manuscript tradition. In texts such as the *Prayer of Joseph*, the *Testament of Moses*, the *Apocalypse of Sophonias*, or the *Greek Apocalypse of Enoch*, utopia takes the form of apocalyptic and visionary elements, such as the predictions about the succession of the empires and the end of days. Even in the so-called Jewish historical literature, past events are often elevated to a prophetical level, such as in Eupolemos, who chronicles the history of the Jews from Moses to Solomon in the context of a (lost) work on the prophecy of Elias; or in the historical drama on *Exodus*, was written in the second century BC by a Jewish playwright of Alexandria, that emphasised and amplified biblical episodes, such as the dream of Jacob, and adorned the biblical narrative with additional legends, such as that of the Arabian phoenix. Perhaps, argues Troiani, it was precisely against these literary trends that the Jewish philosopher Aristoboulos, tutor of a Ptolemaic king, invited the readers of the Bible not to degenerate in the *muthôdes*. Even in a historical book of the Bible, *2 Maccabees*, the writer often inserts episodes (such as the apparition of angels) that are out of the real world, possibly in order to convince his readers that in history even the most repentine and unexpected changes may happen. In Philo's exegetical works, too, Moses and other celebrated figures of Jewish history become metahistorical and idealised, and are transferred to a spiritual and speculative dimension, with no link to human time and space.

The essay by Alessandro Galimberti concentrates on another case of retrospective utopia. He shows that the constitutions of Draco, Solon and Cleisthenes, along with the so-called third constitution, probably devised by Demetrius of Phaleron, were among the ideal models of *politeia* that Hadrian used when giving a new constitution to the Athenians. All these models were crystallised by the Greek tradition as perennial paradigms that could be applied to any state at any time. Between the first and the second centuries AD, in addition, the Roman juridical tradition began to draw a parallel between the Solonian legislation and the decemviral legislation of the Twelve Tables, a parallelism clearly in fashion in the *Enchiridion* and in the commentaries by Gaius, both of the Hadrianic period. Conversely, the biography of Hadrian in the *Historia Augusta* associated Hadrian's legislation to that of King Numa, almost to redress the balance between the Greek and Roman heritages (or in order to polemise with Plutarch's preference for Lycurgus to Numa in the *Bioi*).

Maria Teresa Schettino analyses a well-known constitutional utopia, namely the dialogue between Maecenas and Augustus in Book 52 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. Dio's Maecenas indicates a moderate monarchy, with a prominent role of the senate, as the best form of government of the state. The problem is that the whole dialogue is a projection backwards of political debates of the third century AD. In fact Septimius Severus, whom Dio admired, referred to Augustus and Sulla as models -- not to Caesar, who had deprived the Senate of much power. The Severan constitution must thus be regarded as a peculiar form of mixed constitution that appealed to the e/lites of the Eastern Empire, because these elites had just made their way into the Senate.

The section is closed by the contribution by Agnès Molinier Arbo, who analyses the figure of the *optimus princeps* in the *Historia Augusta*. In this work the author, disillusioned about the past and future of the empire, seeks refuge in the elaboration of unrealistic models, where fantastic and imaginary elements prevail over the utopian one.

The second section of the book is devoted to the organisation of space, both at private level and with regard to the foundation of cities. Renaud Robert looks at the antinomy between public and private space in the Roman house, and identifies the latter as the possible space for private utopias and evasion from the political preoccupations. In this case, the concept of utopia must be sought in the ideal of *otium* that governed the life of the Roman upper classes, both in the Republican and in

the imperial period. The Roman house becomes the mediating space between public and private life, to the point that the public space of the *forum* or *agora* is gradually replaced by the *atrium*, the open space for meetings and hearings in the *domus*. Traditional public spaces, such as the *peristilium*, the library, the *pinakotheke* and even the *basilica* (cf. Vitruvius, *De Arch.* 6.5.2) also enter the Roman private house, and, furthermore, in houses modelled on the structure of the Hellenistic palace the theatre plays a major part as a space of aggregation and exchange with the outer world.

Elena Calandra focuses on a specific case, a macroscopic, almost feverish operation of utopian creation of the Roman imperial period, namely the foundation by Hadrian of Antinoê or Antinoupolis in Egypt in honour of his boy-friend Antinous, drowned in the Nile on 22 October 130. The diffusion and elaboration of an idealised image of Antinous itself shows the power of utopia as a means of communication and propaganda in the ancient world. The ideal model for the city is, of course, Athens, with its system of tribes and demes, assemblies and deities. Before Hadrian, Hellenistic kings had founded new ideal cities, like Hadrian, as a form of *imitatio Alexandri*: Seleucus IV Nicator created Antioch as a New Macedon, and, later, Constantine reinvented Rome at Byzantium, while his mother restructured the holy space for devotion in Palestine.

The third and last section collects a series of representations of Other Worlds, with a utopian or dystopian character. The description of unknown peoples, often living on remote islands, allows the writers to describe extraordinary communities, with utopian governments and equalitarian societies. The theme of the voyage is at the centre of the first contribution, by Sandrina Cioccolo, which deals with the figures of the sailor and the fisherman as the ideal king. In the ancient sources the sea voyage became the metaphor of the quest for knowledge, and therefore the voyage of Odysseus becomes the archetype of the intellectual formation of the sage and the king.

The essay by the late Dino Ambaglio looks at the colourful catalogue of second-hand utopias offered by Diodorus Siculus in his *Historical Library*. Ambaglio argues that, although it is dangerous to interpret all ancient description of remote peoples and islands as positive utopias, we can definitely detect in Diodorus a genuine interest in the history of human progress. This interest mirrors the enlarged political context of Diodorus' day, that is, the universal empire of Alexander the Great further advanced by Rome. The Roman expansion, from Caesar onwards, stimulated the exploration of the world, and consequently promoted further ethnographical research on the populations recently annexed to the *oikoumenê*. In his ethnic descriptions, which Diodorus takes from sources almost entirely lost for us, such as Euhemerus, Iamblichus, and Dionisius Skytobrachion, the historian did not feel obliged to distinguish between *mirabilia* and reality. The desire to encompass a universal space legitimised Diodorus to take into account novelistic or fantastic elements and call them history.

Chiara Carsana analyses the extraordinary fortune of the work of Lucian in the political and philosophical thought of modern utopians. Lucian's narrative is not a political pamphlet, but an exquisitely meta-literary narrative, which deploys imaginary voyages to other worlds as a means to criticise human society. Lucia dreams and represents alternative systems, based on principles of justice and social equality, but utterly unrealistic and impossible to apply to the contemporary world. Even the representation of Hades as an alternative society built on peace, justice, and on the absence of desires or passions, is a mere literary fantasy, in which Lucian himself does not believe. Lucian's ideals are not those of a political radical, but of a morally sensitive intellectual, who sees in money the origin of the decadence of Roman society.

Maria Teresa Schettino turns to the relationship between utopia and voyage in a fragment of Theopompus (*FGrHist* 115 F 75c) as is preserved in Aelian's *Varia Historia* 3.18, written under Caracalla. Schettino warns us that Aelian's account does not coincide with the original text of Theopompus. In Aelian's representation of the world, the *orbis terrarum* coincides with the extension of the Roman empire, and the Ocean was seen as the extreme Western limit of the empire. Aelian's interest was probably focalised on the populations situated in the North-Eastern regions of the empire, consistently with the strategic plans of the Severan court. Besides, in Aelian's ideological framework, the territorial expansion and the political power of the Roman empire made it difficult to imagine a better world than the actual one, hence utopia became something mythical, impossible, or out of the earth, exactly like the description of life on the moon in Lucian's *Vera Historia*. This kind of ideal was certainly critical of the life on the real world, but did not propose any alternative system in opposition to the Roman imperial institutions. Schettino also points out that Aelian's work is pervaded by Aelian's Isiac and Pythagoric religiosity and by his belief in reincarnation (Aelian himself was a priest in the temple of Isis at Praeneste). This peculiar spirituality must have played a major role in his critique of the earlier and more material utopia of Theopompus.

The volume ends with a contribution by Giuseppe Zecchini, examining a series of texts of the late antique period, in which the description of the contemporary situation of the empire is so anachronistic that could appear an utopia. In particular, the *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* by Palladius (V century) describes the voyage to India of a scholasticus from the Egyptian Thebes, who ends up in the mythical island of Taprobane (Sri Lanka). This island presents analogies with other utopian islands of the Hellenistic tradition; for instance, the inhabitants live happy and extremely long lives. A strikingly odd element is that these people are terrorised by the idea of being invaded by the Roman empire, which they deem superior to them in both military and political terms -- something not really credible for the fifth century. Why did Palladius represent the Roman empire as superior to any form of utopia? The late antique period was particularly sensitive to military utopias that looked at the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian as ideal times (Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris*, addressed to Theodosius), or even celebrated the armed forces of the age of Diocletian and Constantine (Sinesius' *Peri basileias*, addressed to Arcadius). Zecchini raises the important question whether these late antique aspirations to a renewed strength of the Roman empire may be regarded as utopias, or were just nostalgic revivals of the Roman empire, or hopes that the contemporary army could manage to save the empire from the crisis. He concludes that most authors of the fourth and fifth centuries looked back not at the classical or the Augustan period, but at a recent past, namely the Diocletianic-Constantinian period, and at emperors such as Carinus and Galerius as the ideal models for a renewal of the empire. It is because of our modern awareness of the military crisis of the late antique period that we cannot share with these authors their militant hope that the crisis could be defeated by a reformed army and an improved administration. The late antique period is also crucial as the time when Christianity first negated and then overrated utopian aspirations, with Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, for instance, where the Christian version of the ideal city supplants its Graeco-Roman counterpart for good. After the impact of Christianity, echoes of the utopian constructions of the Graeco-Roman period will resurface only with Erasmus and Thomas More.

This volume is presented in a beautiful and sophisticated, although a little overpriced, editorial dress. It is certainly a very welcome contribution to a debate, which is bound to be continued, as the philosophical and the strictly-speaking literary perspectives of utopian representations in antiquity are still open to further research. The selection of topics operated by the editors is varied and exhaustive, and the contributions are both solidly researched and clearly presented. Chiara Carsana and Maria Teresa Schettino should thus be congratulated on their excellent and extremely helpful

work, as both authors and editors, of what will constitute a necessary read for all interested in the ancient world and in the history of ideas.

[[1]] S. Mazzarino, *Il pensiero storico classico*, Vol. 2, Roma--Bari 1966, 37-53, 412 n. 555; M.I. Finley, *Utopianism ancient and modern*, in *The Use and Abuse of History*, London 1975, 178-192, repr. in B. Moore and K.H. Wolff (eds.), *The Critical Spirit. Essays in Honor of Herbert Marcuse*, Boston 1967, 3-20; E. Gabba, *True History and False History in Classical Antiquity*, JRS 71 (1981), 50-62, repr. (in Italian) in *Cultura classica e storiografia moderna*, Bologna 1995, 23-29.

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